UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

The place where streams seek ground. Towards a new territorial governmentality: the meaning and usage of the concept of territorial cohesion in the European Union

Hissink Muller, B.M.

Publication date
2013

Link to publication

Chapter 11 The Intergovernmental Conferences usage area

Introduction

In line of the analytical quadrangle made above, the Treaty debates are an important area to look for strategic positions that demarcate the usage of the concept of territorial cohesion. Treaties namely form the institutional fundaments of the European Union politically bargained for during Intergovernmental Conferences (IGCs). Many stories told in these conferences are therefore about for what competencies will (not) be given – *in casu* territorial cohesion. One can then deduce an order from them (§11.1) in which several aggregations of the concept's strategic positions appear (§11.2). Due to the departure-point of this research (i.e. European spatial planning; see Chapter 3), we are thereby mostly interested in how the concept is used for a competency for European spatial planning. From this order, aggregation, and usage two main conclusions can be drawn (§11.3).

11.1 Overviewing the straighforward IGCs usage area

The order of the many stories told in the IGCs usage area (see Appendix C) gives an overview of the developing strategic positions concerning territorial cohesion in the practices of the Treaty debates. Yet, the stories for/against competencies show little development and are straightforward though general, the positions seem to stay relatively the same and the borders of this area of action rather clear. They also point out that the whole territorial cohesion usage field is not independent but strongly related to other areas of action, as especially comes forward in the narratives of 'Power Allocation', 'Regional/Cohesion Policy', 'European spatial planning' and 'SG(E)I' (i.e. Services of General (Economic) Interest). The usage of the concept for a European Union competency for territorial cohesion might thus formally unlock existing areas of action for influences of "outside" forces; albeit by creating new relations between already existing areas, a new (conceptual) organisation within these areas, and/or a totally new (European) area of action.

11.2 The IGCs usage area's un/contested aggregations of the concept's strategic positions

While the structuring stories on territorial cohesion itself denote the disputed importance and development of the bundle of relations and/or areas made by the concept, the form this realignment could take is demarcated by six metanarratives. These metanarratives which relate the strategic positions show, with more or less resistance or success: i) a promotion of a new cohesion objective, ii) a spatial planning on the European level, iii) the provision of SG(E)I, iv) a focus on territorial specificities, v) the need for coordination, and/or vi) the importance of the territorial dimension. Hereby each of them brings forward that the Treaty debates might decide on territorial cohesion's official ground, but that they did not do this yet – safe for the metanarrative on SG(E)I that is, as it points to the only existing official ground for the concept's usage.

Besides that the official positions relate SG(E)I to territorial cohesion, those that relate Cohesion Policy to a competency for territorial cohesion are uncontested. Moreover, in the IGCs usage area there seem to be no positions against the promotion of coordination and territorial specificities with the concept either. However, when it concerns the possible unlocking of an area of action in European spatial planning, things are different. This is shown by the stories on territorial cohesion itself, stories of the European spatial planning narrative, and territorial cohesion stories of the 'spatial planning or territorial cohesion competency' metanarrative. That is to say, there appear both positions for and against, respectively, a Community competency for territorial cohesion, a formalisation of European spatial planning, and the relation/overlap of spatial planning and territorial cohesion – and the plethora of in-between positions adds to the complexity. A threefold contested usage of the concept

of territorial cohesion might then nonetheless be possible. Hence, the promotion of the concept for European spatial planning with stories about territorial cohesion being (related to) spatial planning could formally open the relationship between European Union policies (e.g. regional and cohesion policies) and spatial planning.

11.3 The two main conclusions on the concept's usage in the IGCs

The two main conclusions to draw from the usages of the concept in the IGCs usage area are therefore that the placement of territorial cohesion in Treaties gives the (official) room for possible usages of the concept (e.g. territorial cohesion and SG(E)I or territorial cohesion on *a par* with economic and social cohesion) and that there is a threefold contested usage of the concept that relates European Union policies and spatial planning.

However, as the IGCs only draw the official limits of the space in which the concept can be used, the reorganisation of areas of action with territorial cohesion cannot be described by the IGCs usage area alone. Whether these competencies for territorial cohesion (policy) and spatial planning are, for instance, used for the same areas of action or not – or, if there are overlaps in this, what the differences are – depends largely on what is practiced as European spatial planning and (territorial) cohesion policy; the more so when it is, especially for European spatial planning, more about informal areas of action. This brings the importance to the fore of focussing on the usage of the concept in stories of other usage areas (see the next chapters).